The teacher librarian is in a unique position to directly impact student achievement and collaborate with classroom teachers and specialists to meet academic goals. Therefore it is imperative that the teacher librarian be aware of his or her own learning styles and interpersonal skills. School librarians are charged with working with all types of personalities in the school environment, and if they are going to work successfully as teaching partners, they must establish an understanding of the staff, their expectations, and their approach to teaching. Understanding and capitalizing on the strengths and attitudes of the school principal can also make or break the collaborative environment. Understanding the principal’s priorities and learning how the principal operates are two factors that can have a positive effect on collaborative efforts. The school librarian must also make interpersonal connections with teaching staff and with other individuals in the school community in order to build relationships that will affect change. Through collaboration, the teacher librarian can provide positive learning experiences, create effective working relationships, and provide essential resources to promote academic achievement.

School librarians can and should work to build collaborative relationships with classroom and specialist teachers for the good of the school community, and for the benefit of increasing student achievement. Efforts by the school librarian to be proactive and reflective in establishing collaborative relationships may lead to the perception of the school librarian as being an indispensable asset to the educational process. Paula, an elementary principal, asserts “Collaboration provides high quality partnerships to impact student learning, and the teacher librarian is one of the most important individuals in the school who can impact students’ academic achievement.”

McGregor and other authors assert that many teachers are still unfamiliar with or intimidated by the librarian’s role as a collaborator. Therefore it is important that the librarian expend energy to initiate collaborative efforts and also continually reflect upon collaborative experiences in planning for the next endeavor. After completing the readings and reviewing the testimonials we reflected on what the librarians at our schools do to connect with teachers. We believe a school librarian can begin to collaborate with colleagues by initiating an open approach to build collaborative relationships. A testimonial by Kelly, a high school English student teacher, indicates that the role of the collaboration is more than just pulling books off the shelf. She comments on the importance of the teacher librarian who “helps develop guidelines for projects and remains actively engaged with the teacher in helping students to complete research or in presenting evidence of their new knowledge.”

Collaborative teaching experiences between classroom teachers, specialists, and the librarian are beneficial to student achievement because the teacher and school librarian can work together to ensure that information searches and curriculum content areas are related. Many children learn better if there is a meaningful connection between what they learn in the classroom and what they want to find out in the real world. The goal of teaching information literacy skills is to provide children with the means to pursue life-long learning. If students know how to effectively find and access the information they seek, and ethically use that information, then they are more likely to make positive connections and valuable contributions to the learning process.

McGregor states that initiating leadership by building collaborative relationships can be relatively simple. Ideally, the simplest connections will lead to word-of-mouth and enthusiasm among the school community. Teachers will often welcome collaborative efforts and seek additional ways for the school librarian to assist them in meeting curriculum and district learning standards.

The school librarian can:

* Visit the teachers’ lounge or have lunch with various staff members and engage in informal conversations about opportunities to work on collaborative projects.
* Initiate collaborative efforts with friends at the start of the school year, and branch out with efforts to engage new teachers as a mentoring endeavor.
* Obtain a curriculum map for each grade level to stay abreast of the content areas covered in each grade level classroom. This provides the librarian with an “anchor” from which to launch collaborative projects.
* Attend monthly grade level meetings to connect content areas being studied in a particular grade level, and gather evidence regarding student deficiencies and ways to address achievement concerns. This creates an opportunity to discuss various ways in which the school librarian can become involved in projects that may boost student achievement.
* Provide staff development with regard to new technologies and effective ways to implement their use with students. This effort is crucial in providing a support network for teachers unfamiliar with technology that is available and appropriate for classroom use.

These are just the first steps, but they are important to initiating collaboration and creating a stronger sense of collegiality in a school setting. A testimonial by Pat, a 7th grade Social Studies teacher, confirms that “collaborating with teachers on student projects impacts student learning and also leads to teacher instruction about how to use the library effectively to teach across the curriculum. Diane, a high school art teacher affirms that “the teacher librarian has an impact on teacher professional development by helping the teacher integrate the research and writing process.”

As Harvey (2008) points out in “Collaboration Connections,” most careers require workers to collaborate and work with their colleagues. Johnson (2004) asserts that efforts by the school librarian to be proactive and reflective lead to the perception of the school librarian as being an indispensable asset to the educational process. The learning and inquiry process needs to be consistently modeled in everyday classroom experiences. As a librarian it is imperative to collaborate with teachers and help students learn how to conduct effective research strategies. The inquiry process and information literacy skills are meant to be taught in tandem, rather than isolation. If the curriculum content lends itself to research and inquiry, the librarian needs to be proactive and begin to initiate collaborative efforts with a few teachers and branch out from there. Hopefully, more teachers will be receptive to collaborative efforts and ask for the librarian’s input and help.

Works Cited

References

Hartzell, Gary N. Building Influence for the School Librarian. Worthington, OH: Linworth, 1994. (Needs Assessment, pp. 144-145)

Harvey II, Carl A. (2008). *Collaboration connections*. School [Library Media Activities Monthly](http://ezproxy.twu.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lih&AN=31952572&site=ehost-live), 24(9) 2008. 20-22.

Johnson, D. (2004). Proactivity and reflection: Tools to improve collaborative experiences. *Minnesota Media*. Retrieved May 28, 2010 from <http://www.doug-johnson.com/dougwri/collaboration-and-reflection.html>.

McGregor, J. Collaboration and Leadership. In Stripling, B. K. and Hughes-Hassell, S. (eds.), *Curriculum Connections through the Library*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2003. 119-219. (pdf)

Zmuda, A., and V. H. Harada. The Learning Specialist: Clarifying the Role of Library Media Specialists. In *Librarians as Learning Specialists: Meeting the Learning Imperative for the 21st Century*, 2008. 23 – 43.